



Dual Citizenship

Issue #43
Summer 2018

Dual citizenship is a status in which a person is concurrently regarded as a citizen of more than one country under the laws of those countries. In a very real sense, Christians have dual citizenship, being citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven and an earthly kingdom at the same time. In this situation the question of allegiance may arise, which in turn can lead to suspicion and mistrust as to where our heart truly lies. Jesus touched on this question when He said, *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”* Matt 6:24

To be frank, Christians must sometimes be different; because although “in the world,” we are taught to “not be of the world,” (Jn 15:19) This can result in a certain detachment from and tension with fellow citizens, neighbors, co-workers, etc. who may not understand or appreciate our dual citizenship. Peter wrote, *“in all this, they (non-Christians) are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you.”* 1 Pet 4:4 In the book of Esther, Haman sought to cast suspicion on the Jews in Babylonian

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captivity when he said to king Nebuchadnezzar, *“there is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom;*

their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain.” Est 3:8 Clearly Haman was trying to feather his own political nest by exploiting suspicion of captives whose hearts and hopes were still in Jerusalem. In the later part of the first century, early Christians were persecuted when they refused to acknowledge Caesar as god, and this was construed as disloyalty to the Roman Empire – somewhat like Shadrach’s, Meshach’s and Abednego’s refusal to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s golden statue (Dan 3).

Though citizens of two kingdoms Christians know where their true allegiance lies. And our loyalty to “King, Jesus” not only describes our submission to His high calling, but also circumscribes our character and governs who we are, how we act and how we integrate into whatever earthly kingdom we may find ourselves. **This publication issue explores the premise that attributes which make us good citizens in the Kingdom of Heaven, generally also equip us to be model citizens in our “earthly kingdom(s).”** Dual citizenship can be quite beneficial.

As an example, think about the potentially tense situation when we notice a police car behind us with lights flashing and perhaps siren blaring. The outcome of this encounter can vary significantly. But when we (both us and the peace officer) conduct ourselves as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, the outcome may be embarrassing, but it should end on a positive note. As an exercise, think for a moment about how each of the Christian characteristics in the blue table of contents (to the left) can influence the outcome of this encounter. These will be discussed in more detail in this publication.

Jesus said, *“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”* John 18:36 As citizens of this heavenly realm we are to put aside things like: anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech

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and lying, and put on godly characteristics such as: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness. (Col 3:8-9) Christians are the salt of their earthly realm by living out characteristics associated with the heavenly kingdom.

Peace

Russ Ward

Christian living at its very core is peaceful in nature because its purpose is to be at peace with God. Perhaps those who claim to be “Christians” have forgotten what that means, and if not careful we can be confused with scriptures that may lead us to irrational or indeterminate thoughts regarding the subject; *“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.”* Mt 10:34 *“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight . . .”* John 18:34 *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, and powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual; wickedness in high places.”* Eph 6:12 If we were to take these verses at face value without any context and let loose our own emotions, preconceived thoughts and ideas, or those things taught to us from our youth by others who were also misdirected in their world view, how would we reconcile “Christianity” with peacefulness?

The other thing we should take into consideration is the selfishness that lies within mankind, leading us into the sinful thoughts and actions we often reveal to the outside world. As a whole man never stops to think that sin, as it is put forth in James 1:14-15, at

its core is selfishness. It is the selfishness of sin that leads us away from peace with God and as an extension undermines peace with our fellow man. It is not a difficult thing to have a semblance of peace with those who are similar to us, think like us, or have a general view of life’s relationships that matches ours. Peace is not found where there is an intense separation of ideas, beliefs, and actions. If we know this to be the case how is the Christian supposed to live peaceably in the world when the world is at enmity with God?

Paul’s answer is best found in Philippians 4: 4-9. By prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving the peace of God will guard the Christian, that peace that passes all understanding which keeps our hearts and mind through Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to say, “. . . Those things, which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of Peace shall be with you.” (4:9) From just these few passage we can extract that peace comes from God, requires assistance from God to achieve, does not come without asking, and most importantly is only found in Him. True peace that has transcended time and circumstances has been found in those with a true relationship to God.

Secondly confrontation and disagreement is not always a deterrent to peace or to peaceful relationships, however these can be taken too far wherein sin enters in the foray. Consider the following examples, Paul & Barnabas over John Mark, Paul & Peter over the Gentile Chris-

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tians, Paul on Mars Hill, and there are multiple examples of Christ in his interactions with various Jews and even with his Apostles. If we look to achieve peace in this world by absolving ourselves of all conflict we will find ourselves to be miserable people in general and mediocre Christians at best. Peace has to be sought wherein unification is found and where the basis of unity is more important than our position or attitude.

Peace is complicated, with many moving parts and challenging situations. There are some constants of peace that can be grasped and held onto, and there are some intangible aspects that require both diligence and perseverance to balance. Paul in Romans 12:1-2 commands that we provide a reasonable service to God through self sacrifice, not being conformed to the world of chaos, but transformed from the earthly to the spiritual, living in the flesh, yet living for God. He continues that vein of thought through to verse 18, “. . . *If it be possible, as much that lies within you, live peaceably with all men.*” I have witnessed in my lifetime peaceful men who with trust, determination and fortitude have stood up against evil, violence, and wickedness matching it pound for pound, strength for strength, and at the same time enveloping wickedness of man with arms of strength, comfort, and support. It is a difficult thing to accomplish and I believe that is why Paul through the Holy Spirit writes it in such a manner. To both live peacefully and to be at war (odds) with the world stretches a Christian to his/her limits, yet what seems improbable is possible. *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* Phil 4:13

Christians Value Absolute Truth

Ephriam Davis

It is interesting to see the many different ways we as humans respond to truth. Some embrace truth and run towards it, while some are afraid of truth and run from it. Many will deny truth actually exists. Still others will fabricate their own “version of truth,” using current day vernacular, “present the alternative facts,” or to put it another way borrowing a Michael Jackson song lyric line, “the lie becomes the truth.” The truth even offends and angers many people. Unlike so many, the Christian confidently strives to live in society based on knowledge and understanding that the Bible is God’s word, and is absolutely the most trustworthy source of all **truth**. (Jn 16:13,17:17) *“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in **truth**, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”* 1Ths 2:13 (NKJV) Therefore, let us examine these 3 major topics in light of the absolute **truth** that help make faithful Christians stand out.

The Need to Obey The Gospel

Truth defines and convicts us of sin which is lawlessness when we are tempted and drawn away by our own uncontrolled desires. It also defines the consequences of sin which are spiritual death and bondage.

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(Rom 7:7, Jas 1:12-15) Thankfully, **truth** can make us free. (John 8:31-36) The God of grace, mercy, and **truth** planned and provided the perfect pathway to redeem us back. (Jn 1:14, Tit 2:14) The gospel, (1 Cor 15:1-4) is the narrow pathway that leads to eternal life (Mt 7:13-14). Many men and manmade religious organizations refuse to even acknowledge sin, and for those that do, they refuse to accept the **one true gospel**. (Mt 7:21-23; Gal 1:6-12) It is simple, it must be obeyed (2Ths 1:8-9, 2:6-12).

The Origin of Man Creation -Vs- Evolution

These are the two primary, but yet conflicting explanations for the origin of man. On the surface, the following question might seem innocent, and probably most everyone has heard it asked at some point in life. *“Which came first, the chicken or the egg?”* According to the Pew Research Center, Charles Darwin published “The Descent of Man,” which argues that humans are descended (*evolved*) from apes, in 1871. The author of this NBcoC publication article, Summer-2018, was introduced to the “Theory-of-Evolution” and indoctrinated with it while attending school during the 1970s – 1980s. He had adopted a “hybrid philosophy” for the origin of man that assumed God had used the evolutionary process to create humans since he was also brought up in a denominational church environment during this same time period. It was in the Summer-1984, after this author had obeyed the gospel, that he decided to publicly challenge his faithful bible class teacher with this “hybrid philosophy,” sin-

cerely believing it as a matter of fact, rather than theory. This wise teacher politely asked this erroneous student to read the following verse at least 3 times before the **truth** finally sunk in. *“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (soul).”* Gen 2:7 The person who originated the supposed “...the chicken or the egg?” challenge is best described as a deceived or dishonest skeptic, denying that **truth** can be known. The faithful Christian will assertively answer in **truth**, “the chicken.” Gen 1:21-23

Partiality Based on Character Neutral Attributes

To define **partiality**, we cite the following scriptures from the word of **truth** in context and list a few synonyms: (bias, prejudice, preconception and preference). *“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you ^{show} **partiality**, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.”* Jas 2:8-9 *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without **partiality** and without hypocrisy.”* Jas 3:17 To understand the phrase “Character Neutral Attributes” (CNAs), we must understand, while all people are descendants of Adam and Eve (Gen 5:1-4), we each were given physical attributes of which we had no choice and were beyond our control, but they all help make us unique by divine design. The following visible CNAs are the result of our genetic makeup such as: height, tall or short; natural eye

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color; natural hair color and/or texture; hair quantity, thick or bald; variation in size and shape of basic facial features; and even skin color. To another degree, there are also a few CNAs that are attributable to what country, state, city or family we were born into, such as language and/or inherited wealth.

As we meditate on the above definitions can we observe ourselves in the mirror of **truth** (Jas 1:23-24)? Why do so many congregations of the LORD's church remain segregated? Do we feel threatened around others who may not look like us, or appear to have the same "socio-economic" status as we do? Do we only fellowship with those that look like us? Do we feel comfortable studying and discussing these biblical questions with others. Visit the following URL for a discussion of these issues.

<http://www.justchristians.com/resources/race-forum-2017>

The faithful Christian recognizes the need to always be open to the fact that they may still need to dig deeper into God's word to understand **truth** even when they may feel or think they have mastered it. This is especially true as we recognize the need to spread the gospel and interact with people of races and cultures different from our own. Each and every soul was made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), and every soul needs to hear the gospel message. Jesus Christ exemplified this **truth** in that He indiscriminately had empathy and sympathy for everyone He interacted with. Do we want to be more like Christ?

Christians Help Others In Need

Kelly Johnson

God is our unchanging Father who guides us in all that we do. Scripture tells us that He is unchanging and eternal (Heb 6:17-18, Jas 1:17). The James passage also tells us that God provides for us in ways great and small. As we think about how we relate to others in the church and in the world, we need to have that in our minds at all times.

Scripture is also clear on how we are to interact with mankind. We are not left without guidance on how God wants us to behave. In Luke the tenth chapter we see Jesus responding to a question and using that opportunity to teach about how we should treat God and man. The question on how to inherit eternal life is answered with a reference to the Old testament, and a parable. Verse 27 of Chapter 10 is a key verse *"And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. . .'"* Love your neighbor as yourself is a fundamental concept that Christians should observe. It is, in this verse, likened to our relationship to God.

Most people have heard the saying "Good Samaritan" but some may not know its origin. Jesus teaches with a parable about the Good Samaritan to help illustrate the point made in verse 27, our neighbor is anyone that we encounter that we can help. Verses 30 through 37 provide an education on exactly who acted in a loving,

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neighborly way. The Samaritan (a race disliked by the Jews) stopped to render aid to the man who had been robbed and beaten. He invested time, energy and money to help a stranger in need. While Jesus just called him a "Samaritan," this man is almost always referred to as "The Good Samaritan." There are even organizations today that have modeled themselves after this man's actions.

Scripture also gives us insight to how Christians are to treat one another. In the book of Acts, chapter 4, verses 32 through 35 we can read about how the early Church took care of their own who were in need. They voluntarily gave of their own means to help those who were in need. Our obligation to help is an individual obligation, not one that belongs to the collective congregation. To be sure there are areas where the church does have obligation toward benevolence, but as we saw in Luke 10:27 and the parable to follow, individual action is modeled.

Galatians 6:9-10 encourages us to not lose heart, or wavier in our efforts to do good, *"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. . ."* "All people" is a tall order! We are often very considerate of our brothers and sisters in the faith, but sometimes we do not look past the boundary of our faith to see those in the world around us that need our help. And, sadly, sometimes we fail to even notice the needs of our family of faith. In order to be the kind of people we are striving to be, we need to move our focus outside ourselves and look around. There is no shortage of

opportunity to help others in need.

Since the scriptures are so clear on this point, the effort does not lie in understanding the teaching, but rather in making that teaching an active part of our life. There are many ways in which we can help others. If we only view helping in terms of financial help, we may lose sight of the fact that there are many opportunities to help others that do not revolve around money.

In Acts chapter 3 we read about Peter and John healing a man crippled from birth. In verse 6 Peter tells the man begging alms that he has no money, but he can help, he heals the man. While we are not able to miraculously heal the sick, we can learn a lesson from this event. Often the help we give is in the form of emotional comfort or helping with physical needs. We need to be attuned to all the types of help we might offer so that we do not fail to see where help is needed.

There is joy in helping others. Seeing a need and meeting that need results in a feeling of accomplishment and a sense of well-being. Sometimes when we are feeling low, the best thing we can do is focus outside ourselves and seek someone to help. In any event, helping others is a scriptural command. We should be helping others because God has instructed us to do so.

Sometimes we are judged by the actions of others. While it may not be fair, it is all too often true. A person has a bad experience with someone who wears the name of "Christian" and applies that bad feeling to all Christians. As we go through life we will

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have many opportunities to help others. How we handle those opportunities may reflect on the entire body of Christ. God will judge us individually, but the world is not so careful. It is just another reason to be on our guard to do good to all men without regard to their faith.

The Christian desires to be like Jesus Christ who was the model of service to others. He committed Himself to the service of mankind, to the point of death on the cross, so that our relationship to God the Father could be restored. Surely, we can dedicate ourselves not only to the love of God but also to the love of mankind as well. We can demonstrate that we have learned the lesson of Luke 10:27 and are doing as Jesus said in verse 28, “. . . *do this and you will live.*”

Christians Are Upright, Moral, Family-Oriented

Carol Fertig

A late-night television show host proclaims himself the arbiter of morals for our society and the country accepts him as such. If people don't accept homosexuals "married" to each other and give them all the rights and privileges of "traditional" couples, they are haters and must learn tolerance. Up is down and down is up, in is out and out is in, and if you don't embrace those ideas, you are either out of touch, stupid, or just plain mean. We are told we must honor, tolerate, and promote any idea of marriage and family the world dreams up for itself. The Christian with his dual citizenship has a difficult row to

hoe in this regard. It will help to remember Whom we serve. When Peter and John were hauled before the Council of the Jews and told not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, they answered, “. . . *Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.*” Acts 4:19-20 It is clear which citizenship is dominant: the spiritual one, the Kingdom of God. We must still today speak (and live) what we have heard through the scriptures to be pleasing to our King.

God first organized His people into families in the physical realm. He joined Adam and Eve in the marriage relationship and said they would become one flesh. (Gen 2:24). Adam was to be head of the family, just as later Christ is head of the spiritual family. How important, then, is it to keep the family of both kingdoms morally and physically pure? Ruth was a Moabite woman who returned with her mother-in-law Naomi to Canaan when the famine was ended. Her husband had died, but Ruth was devoted to Naomi and followed her instructions in Naomi's land and culture to gain another husband. Boaz, their close kinsman, knew of Ruth's character, for when she went to him at night, he said to her, “*And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.*” Ruth 3:11 Ruth had, with Naomi's help, established her good character in the eyes of the people and was worthy to be Boaz's wife. It is no small thing that this moral and good Moabite woman is an ancestor to our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

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It is pleasing to God to keep oneself pure before and within marriage today, though the world thinks nothing of living as married when not indeed married and of having affairs outside the marriage. There is even a place online where carnally-minded people can go to find partners for adultery! (I did not check out that web site, but learned of it from secondary sources.) It is important to note that God has not changed His mind about the marriage relationship: He says through Malachi, *“For I the Lord do not change . . .”* Mal 3:6 It is still one man and one woman becoming one flesh. `

I dare say divorce has touched everyone reading this in one way or another. Pharisees testing Jesus asked Him about causes allowing for divorce, and Jesus replied: *“ . . . Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. ‘What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.’”* Mt 19:4-6 Further, the one who remarries after divorce for any cause other than sexual immorality, sins: *“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”* Lu 16:18 Christians are family-oriented and will maintain their marriages with love and consistent effort, and it will be obvious to the world that there is something special about them and their devotion to their relationships. Malachi explains that Judah profaned the covenant of God so that God no longer accepted

their offerings. They committed this profanity when they were faithless to the *“wife of your youth.”* Mal 2:13-16

At a critical point in the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles, a question of whether believers had to be circumcised arose. Believing Pharisees said they must be, but James and the other apostles understood that it was not necessary. They wrote a letter to the Gentile believers telling them to *“abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.”* Acts 15:20-29 The letter concluded *“ . . . If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well . . .”* Morality, sexual purity, was as important as idolatry and food restrictions in the lives of these early Christians. Since we have seen above that God does not change, what He wanted from these believers has not changed. He still demands sexual uprightness, so the family, the church, will not be weakened and polluted by transgressions. I Corinthians 5 tells of sexual immorality in the church there and how it is to be handled. They had moved away from the advice given by James and the other elders from Jerusalem and were condemned for it.

Paul has much to say in his letters about how people within the family of the Lord should behave. Instructions are given for elders, deacons, the unmarried, the widowed, the young and the old, especially in 1 Corinthians 5, 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Timothy, and Titus 2. We show that we are good citizens of both the secular kingdom and the kingdom of God when we focus on the well-being of both our physical families and our spiritual family.

Christians and Taxes

Steven D. Baxley

Probably no one really likes the idea of being taxed. People will debate what to tax, how much to tax, who should be taxed, and how much they should be taxed. In the end, for most people, taxes are best paid by others, and not themselves.

The question of taxes is certainly not a new one, and it is one that Scripture addresses directly and emphatically. Although citizens of the Kingdom of God, Christians are also citizens of earthly nations, and have responsibilities to both realms.

Jesus himself was asked a question about taxes during his earthly ministry. To set the stage a bit, some of the Jewish leaders were hoping to trap Jesus in His words so that He could be arrested and handed over to the Roman authorities (Luke 20:19-20). The question they asked Jesus was this: *“Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?”* Lu 20:21-22 To be clear, the word for “tribute” in this text can also be translated as “tax.” Jesus answers the question in this way:

“Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” They said, “Caesar’s.” He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”
Lu 20:24-25

Jesus’ answer is interesting for a couple of different reasons. First, he recognizes that there are two realms under which the Jews

had to function. One was the Roman government under which they lived and which was represented ultimately by the Caesar (at that time, the Caesar was Tiberius), the other was the government of God. Second, Jesus makes no room for deciding whether an earthly government is “worthy” of receiving taxes. The Roman government was often oppressive and its leaders lived immoral lives. Millions were enslaved under this government, and there were various levels of justice/injustice provided, depending upon the legal status of those under its control. It was a Roman governor who would sentence Jesus to death by crucifixion. This same Roman government would later viciously persecute Christians living under its control. Jesus doesn’t say: “Pay taxes only to support “good” laws or “good” governors.” Jesus doesn’t say: “Pay taxes only when the government is doing what it should.” The Jews had their answer, it is not only lawful to pay taxes, in fact, it was God’s will that they do so.

There are other New Testament passages that speak to this question, and they are specifically addressed to Christian audiences, making it abundantly clear that Jesus wasn’t merely answering a “Jewish” question.

In Paul’s discussion about the Christians’ relationship to civil government, he wrote this to Christians living in Rome itself:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good

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conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience." Rom 13:1-5

What is Paul's conclusion to his words telling Christians that they are to obey the government? That they should also pay their taxes!

"For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed." Rom 13:6-7

Paul even goes so far as to use two different words for what Christians need to pay: "taxes" and "revenue" (as well as showing respect and honor).

Without mentioning taxes specifically, Peter also reminds his Christian readers that they are to be subject to the earthly governing authorities:

"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should

put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." 1 Pet 2:13-17

The only Scriptural limitation to this is when government/authorities require Christians to disobey God either by doing something God forbids or by not doing something that God commands. Notice how Peter and John answered when they were told by the Jewish authorities to stop preaching about Jesus: *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."* Acts 4:19-20 This principle must be carefully applied, and Christians must be careful not to try to misuse it to rationalize not paying taxes for immoral purposes. This question isn't under consideration in Acts, and is adequately answered by Jesus himself, as well as in Paul's words to the saints in Rome.

Frivolous Lawsuits and Foolish Schemes

Gary Mangus

The love we have for God should be evident to everyone. *"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord."* Rom 12:9-11

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When we are with our brothers and sisters, with family, with friends, at work, or anytime we are in contact with others in the world, our actions should be consistent for each moment of our lives. We should treat everyone with love and kindness. *“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.”* 1 Cor 13:4-6

If we are living our lives as a Christian should, we would avoid **frivolous lawsuits**. We would not get angry with a brother or sister, neighbor, or enemy; we would forgive their debt, suffer wrong, pay them their due, and be kind in all situations.

Paul in writing to the Church in Corinth dealt with a number of problems arising from their foolish actions where they were still thinking like the world. Paul admonishes them, *“When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? ...are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ... why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? ...Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute... To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud — even your own brothers!”* 1 Cor 6:1-8

Paul points out that it is better to suffer wrong and be defrauded than to go to court over trivial cases. As a Christian we have the responsibility to protect the reputation of the Lord’s people and the church of Christ.

We all know that no one really wins in such court cases and these can result in loss of reputation for the individuals involved and may bring damage to the Lord’s work. However, we may receive a summons to appear in court as a witness or in a case brought against us. We are required to have liability insurance on our homes, cars, etc. that could result in court cases between members when insurance companies sue to recover costs and settle cases. In all cases, Christians should not get angry, but treat each other with love and respect. Accidents do happen. We should be thankful for the court systems we have to carry out God’s justice.

We should not compartmentalize our daily life. If we become a different person in different situations, alarms should be ringing in our mind. When this happens we should realize that we have let the ways of world into our mind. And as such we have let the schemes of the devil over come us and we are set on a course for destruction and separation from God! And we should take immediate action to correct our daily walk with God and ask for forgiveness, however, if we did not get this wakeup call from our conscience, then we are telling ourselves it is good. We need to evaluate our lives continually with prayer and with careful study of the word of God to test ourselves if we are pleasing God. If not, we could be tossed to and fro with the **foolish schemes** of the world. We need to protect our heart with the truth.

Is your heart full of love for Money? Money is not wrong within itself. Paul wrote, *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and*

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pierced themselves with many pangs.” 1 Tim 6:9-10

There are many other types of love that could be a problem for us. They could be love for the World, love for Popularity, love for Self, and love for Pleasures, and so on. Anyone of these could be a problem for us if we let this love take over our life and our heart. There is nothing in this world, that entices one away from God, that will last. The word of John should lead us to sober reflection. He said, *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life — is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” 1 Jn 2:15-17*

We live in an age where we are constantly enticed by pleasure. Our society has grown up with instant entertainment being presented to us via social media, television, radio, computers, smart-phones, tablets, gaming devices, etc. If we allow it, our minds are being bombarded with messages of the world at a fast and alarming rate. The media and devices are also tools used in our jobs, schools, church and in our normal activities in our lives. And millions are following in the footsteps of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. They are wasting their lives in pleasure seeking. To be dominated by anything other than the love of God is a sin.

Even if we are just using the tools, we need to consider the time we are wasting in other activities instead of using it for the Lord. We need to love, pray, read, study, and

capture some time for the Lord every day and every chance we can or we become a fool pursuing **foolish schemes** of the devil. *“Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time (making the best use of the time) (ESV), because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not **foolish**, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Eph 5:15-17)(ASV)*

Respect & Dignity

Sarie Jones

As members of the Lord’s Church, we have many duties and responsibilities with regard to love of our brethren, but what about our duties to those outside of the flock? We are told many times in the Bible about the importance of love in our Christian walk, but we might not always analyze what that means, especially when interacting with the world. The Word teaches that everyone, no matter who they are, are deserving of our respect, honor, dignity and compassion.

We are all aware that we should, *“do good to everyone, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Gal 6:10* This puts an emphasis on how to treat our brethren, but we cannot forget about the first part of that statement. The use of the word “everyone” is not ambiguous. This sentiment is also supported in Luke 10:25-37, when an expert in the law asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. The expert correctly surmised that he must *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart*

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and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus then went on to tell the Parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate that everyone we may encounter is a Christian's neighbor and that we are to show mercy to all.

So then, if we know that everyone is our neighbor, how do we in turn show them respect, honor, dignity and compassion? I would posit that it has to come from a well cultivated store of Christian love. Your heart has to be molded into the right shape before you can reach a place to think of others' feelings before your own. The greatest commandment and the second greatest commandment, according to Jesus, are based in love. So our Christian walk absolutely must also be based in love for God and for one another. However, what about when our worldly attitudes try to prevent us from showing honor and respect to our fellow human beings? Each of us will come in contact with people on a regular basis that challenges our patience and kindness. Others do truly awful things. It is a natural human reaction to have our feelings hurt, get angry or even act in kind, but Paul wrote that, *"Love is patient and kind...It is not arrogant or rude. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth...Love never ends."* 1 Cor 13:4-6, 8 This shows us that the love that God has given us is able to conquer any situation, no matter how bleak it may seem.

Compassion is another character trait that must be based in love. In order to show sympathy and concern for the feelings of others we must care about each person we come in contact with and even those we

may never meet. In many ways showing compassion is easier than showing honor and respect. If we hear about suffering or see it happening, then we tend to have an automatic reaction of pity towards that person. However, have you ever caught yourself thinking that they only got in that position because they did it to themselves? We don't have any Biblical authority to judge others that way. After all, God is *"the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort."* 2 Cor 1:3 We should always seek to comfort and care for one another.

So, how do we train ourselves to get to a place of love and be able to have the right attitude? First of all, it takes an active desire to want to shape your life after the example of Christ. As Christians we all desire to be Christ-like, but are we taking the steps to get there? I know that it takes real effort in my own walk to try and always show honor, respect, dignity and compassion to everyone around me. Of course we must first be studying the Word and spending time in thoughtful prayer and asking for God's help in softening our hearts. It is such an important thing for the world to see us having an attitude set apart from everyone else. You might be the first person to treat a certain individual with dignity and compassion in quite some time and that is very likely going to make an impact on that person, whether you see it or not. Of course the opposite is true as well. If we turn up our noses at people or act in anger, that might be the only impression they get of what a Christian is like. It really is a big responsibility for us to carry and one that we should be cognizant of.

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After study and prayer, another technique I like to use to get my attitude back where it needs to be, is thinking about why the person that was rude, mean or violent might be acting that way. This helps me put into perspective how blessed and loved I am and it helps me feel compassion for whatever situation the other person is experiencing or has experienced in his or her life. This really calms me down and reminds me that God loves not only me, but also the other person in the situation.

God has love for all of the people of the world and we should too. Let's all try to make an effort to be more aware of our attitudes, preconceptions and judgments in our daily lives and remember that our goal should be to shine God's love everywhere we go. After all, Paul wrote in Colossians that we should, *"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."* Col 3:12-14

Individual Responsibility

Mark Gray

Paul tells the Thessalonian church to, *"aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your own hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be de-*

pendent on no one." 1 Ths 4: 11-12 Americans have historically valued independence and self-reliance, often praising the "Protestant Work Ethic" which may have been born out of this passage. We want to be neighborly, but we do not want to be that neighbor constantly knocking on the door asking to borrow tools, mowers, cups of sugar, or whatever. Each of us has the responsibility to work to provide for ourselves and our family first and foremost.

Live Quietly

At the end of 2 Corinthians, Paul tells the Christians there *"Aim for restoration, comfort one another, live in peace."* 2 Cor 13:11). He is instructing these brothers to reconcile with each other, but this is good advice for general life. We are not to be rowdy people. There should not ever be loud quarreling or shouting matches in the yard. Our neighbors should not ever have to contemplate calling the police late at night because of a raucous party that is getting out of control and loud. *"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."* Rom 12:18

Mind Your Own Affairs

We are to have genuine concern for our brothers and sisters and even our fellow man. This concern leads us to help those who need help. There is a line between concern and being nosy, however, which Paul warns against in two separate instances. *"Some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies."* 2 Ths 3:11 He also talks of younger widows who *"learn to be idlers, going about from house to house..."*

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gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not." 1 Tim 5:13 A busybody is not a term of endearment. It is a meddler in the affairs of others, a troublemaker, so we should be careful to mind our own business.

Work With Your Own Hands

"Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something share with anyone in need." Eph 4:28 Working with your own hands is very common throughout all scripture. God wants us to work and *"work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."* Col 3:23-24 We work so that we do not burden others. Paul had every reason to seek payment or at the very least food and lodging for his preaching work on his journeys, but he did not. He reminds that *"we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you."* 2 Ths 3:7-8 A beautiful example of working with your own hands comes from Proverbs 31. Here we read of an "excellent wife" or a "worthy woman." There are many qualities that make her excellent, but one that jumps out repeatedly is her willingness to do work. *"She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands."* (vs 13) *"She puts her hands to the distaff and her hands hold the spindle."* (vs 19) these are tools used to turn flax or wool fibers into thread. *"All her household are clothed in scarlet. She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and*

purple." (vs 21b-22). Here her labor is directly for her family and household in making both garments and bed linens. *"She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant."* (vs 24) First, she makes sure her family is provided for, then she makes additional clothing to sell for revenue for her family. She is not the busybody that Paul warns of because she *"does not eat the bread of idleness."* (vs 27) This wonderful woman is a great example for all of us.

We work to provide for our daily necessities. We also work to provide for our families. Most of the time we think of this as our children, but the scriptures also tell us to care for our parents and other relatives. Paul says, *"if anyone does not provide for his relatives, especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."* 1 Tim 5:8 Jesus similarly berates the Pharisees for *"rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother shall surely die.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, 'Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban'"(that is, given to God) – then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition."* Mk 7:9-13 These men were claiming they could not care for their aging parents because they had dedicated those funds to God. God commands us to take care of our family!

God tells us to be busy; to get to work. We should value this responsibility that pre-

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vents us from being reliant on others. There is no honor in being a ward of the state and no satisfaction of a job well done. We should not try to shrug off our responsibility for caring for our children or parents or grandparents onto a government program. Even if we do not enjoy our jobs we are working as for the Lord so we must do our best. *“Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes establish the work of our hands!”* Psa 90:17

Christians are Submissive

Ron Gray

I remember teaching a class here at North Beach a few years ago and as I stood at the podium, I pondered whether to make this point, and then proceeded. I said, “I hesitate to quote Bob Dylan, but he is right in this song,

***“You're gonna have to serve somebody,
It may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.”***

The point I was trying to make was this, even the worldly people knew 39 years ago when that song came out, that we are not “Free Agents” living, breathing, moving in this world with no strings attached.

After Moses was taken up to the mountain top by the Lord and then saw the Promised Land, and died there being buried by the Lord, Joshua the man of God, took the reins of leadership. Joshua knew that mankind was created to be in subjection to a higher power; so he boldly challenged the Israelites to make the choice of a lifetime:

“And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Jos 24:15

Joseph the son of Jacob was favored by his father above all of his brothers, and became the object of jealousy and hatred. He was sold into slavery by his brothers and thought to be dead by his grieving father. None of that family believed they would ever see him again. But, Joseph remained faithful to God and lived in subjection to his master in Egypt only to be falsely accused. He was imprisoned for years but remained submissive first to God and then to all who were over him. Though trials abounded in his life he trusted the Lord and rose to unimaginable heights, yet was still under the authority of Pharaoh.

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” Rom 13:1

We as Christians are to be submissive. The world may tell us to be our own masters, to “look out for number one!” But, the scriptures show us example after example of those who followed that advice to their own ruin. King Herod died in agony after taking the praise and glory that should only belong to God (Acts 12:21-24). The “rich fool” of Jesus’ parable amassed great wealth for himself only to die in the night and leave it all behind (Luke 12:16-21). In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the

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rich man lived a self-centered life and found himself to be in torment after passing from this life (Luke 16:19-30). The real “heroes” of the Bible are men and women who humbled themselves in the sight of the Lord and lived by His Word.

As little children, we recognized that being in submission to our parents was not burdensome, but beneficial to our wellbeing. We realized that the necessities of life were generously supplied along with wise direction and loving care. We learned from the earliest years that our choices were limited to submission or rebellion. Perhaps as we look back on those days, especially the teenage years, we may remember our attempts at rebellion and the consequences that befell us.

When we come up from the waters of baptism and rise to walk in newness of life, no longer to be “enslaved by sin,” (Rom 6:17) we cease to be in Satan’s grip, but we are not set free from obligation. We must grow in faith and mature as Christians.

Beginning the Christian life involves a reorganization of attitude; our own standing, as we see it in the scheme of things may need a major adjustment! The scriptures are filled with wisdom on how to move ourselves from “number one” to a place of Godliness, humility, and service.

Submit to God – Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:6

Submit to each other – Eph 5:21; Jas. 2:1

Submit to the Elders – Heb 13:17

Be Humble before others – Phl 2:3

Show respectful conduct to win souls – 1 Pet 3: 1-2

Submit to the Government – Rom 13:1

When we start to speak of submission, most of us think of the scripture that says, “*Wives, submit to your husbands...*” This phrase out of context causes consternation to those who want to toss out respect for God’s word and replace it with their own world view. But, the truth of the matter is that this entire scripture from Colossians 3:18-25 gives us a blueprint for happy and peaceful lives.

“Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.” Col 3:18-25

In this context, ALL of us must submit, first to the Lord, then to our proper places within the family structure. Then to our positions within the workplace where we perform our work sincerely as though it is for the Lord Himself! It makes me smile that nearly two thousand years ago that God warns against “fake work” on the job, the workers who put on a show for the bosses, but kick back when no bosses are around. Things have not changed much in all of those years.

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Radical religious movements have become suspect in many nations around the world causing fear and uncertainty among those who are tasked with keeping the peace. On the contrary, the true citizen of the heavenly kingdom is not a threat to any government; in fact Christians who follow our God's laws are exemplary citizens of any community, who value truth, honesty, peace, and tranquility among all people.

Christians Are Content

Craig Campbell

When the writer of Hebrews offers his advice for living a contented life, his words on the subject are brief. *"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"* Heb 13:5 This verse shows up in the middle of a long list of exhortations centered around brotherly love, and if we read it too quickly, it's very easy to miss just how much this verse has to say. But when we slow down and absorb the true weight of what is being said, we see that this verse gives us everything we need to rid ourselves of anxiety and unlock the secret to Christian contentment.

Free From Love of Money

The first thing the Hebrew writer says in 13:5 is that we ought to keep our lives *"free from the love of money."* We can almost hear the love and the urgency in this pastoral plea to the writer's fellow Christians.

We sense that he has seen first-hand the detrimental effects of greed, and he begs his brothers and sisters to avoid it at all costs. Perhaps you have found yourself caught up from time to time in this same struggle, yearning for just a little bit more and then realizing that once you get it, it's still not enough.

Most of the passages that talk about contentment in the New Testament are operating within the context of admonitions and encouragements regarding material possessions. In Philippians 4:11, for example, when Paul utters his famous words, *"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content,"* he is referring to money. In verse 10, he rejoices in the gifts that the Philippian brethren had sent his way, but not for the reason we would think. He doesn't rejoice because the gift would now give him enough money to meet his needs. He rejoices because of *"the fruit that increases to [their] credit (v. 17)."* Paul encourages the Philippians, saying that he has *"learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."* Also, when Paul tells Timothy that *"godliness with contentment is great gain,"* 1 Tim 6:6, he shortly thereafter reminds his young protégé that those who long for riches fall into temptations that lead to their destruction. He sums up the passage by saying that *"the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils (v. 10)."*

Coming back to Hebrews 13:5, we can see the same link between money and contentment. The way this verse reads, we can only conclude that as long as we are lovers of money, then we will never find contentment, regardless of how much wealth we

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are able to accumulate.

The problem with wealth is that if we are not careful, when it increases, so does our reliance on it, and so does the trust we place in it. When we strive after wealth, promising ourselves that just a little bit more will be enough, we quickly discover that it isn't, and we find ourselves fighting for even more. We place our trust in riches, and we find our faith in God waning. And it's because of this detrimental effect on our faith that the writer of Hebrews lovingly urges us to keep our lives free of its entanglements.

Be Content with What You Have

Secondly, Hebrews 13:5 tells us to *"be content with what we have."* Jesus has disciples in all tax brackets, and this encouragement is for all of us. Discontentment is a problem for rich and poor alike.

In 1 Corinthians 9:8, Paul says that, *"God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."* The Greek word translated "sufficiency" in this passage is the same word that is usually translated "contentment." These concepts of sufficiency and contentment are inextricably linked. Paul reminds us of the fact that *God is sufficient*. He is enough. No matter how small your paycheck is, it is enough. No matter how small your house is, it is sufficient. Whether you've just made your first million or just filed for bankruptcy, Christ is sufficient.

So the secret to contentment lies not in figuring out how to make enough money or how to fix your current circumstances. Rather, the secret lies in realizing and ac-

cepting the truth that God is enough to meet your needs.

Believe His Promises

Anticipating the idea that many of his readers may be struggling to accept this concept of the sufficiency of God, the writer of Hebrews reminds us of God's promises. In the latter part of Hebrews 13:5, the writer states the reason for his plea to be content with what we have: *"for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'"* Christians have more reason than anyone else in this world for being content, because God is on our side, and He has promised us that He will never forsake us.

When we are discontent, then we are demonstrating a significant lack of faith in God's promises. When Paul says in Philippians 4:11 that he has learned how to be "brought low" and "how to abound", he is simply saying that he has learned how to trust God to meet his needs.

Do you believe God's promises? Do you believe that if you seek His kingdom, then He will take care of you? Are you thankful for what you have, even in the times when what you have doesn't seem like very much? If we can all learn to trust in His promises, then perhaps we will be one step closer to finding our sufficiency in God alone.

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